

The Crucible, Act IV by Arthur Miller
Reading Warm-up B

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

In 1996, more than 40 years after *The Crucible* was first performed, the director Nicholas Hytner made the first English-language motion picture version of Miller's play. The film starred Daniel Day-Lewis as John Proctor, Joan Allen as Elizabeth, Winona Ryder as Abigail Williams, and Paul Scofield as Judge Danforth. Arthur Miller wrote the screenplay.

There was little disagreement or disputation among the critics, who warmly praised the film version. Winona Ryder was singled out for her interpretation of Abigail as a character of complex motivations. On one level, Abigail acts out of retaliation against John and Elizabeth, wishing to revenge herself for John's rejection. Abigail can thus beguile the court into accusing Elizabeth of witchcraft. On another level, however, Ryder interprets Abigail as appalled when events spin out of control. Late in the film, Abigail's eyes inaudibly express her horror. She does not, of course, become openly more conciliatory or retract her accusations; it is too late for that. However, her gaunt and almost haunted expression hint at a certain degree of regret, or even penitence, for her actions.

One of Arthur Miller's universal themes in *The Crucible* is the challenge to the individual of retaining self-respect when society seems bent on destroying it. This is the reason for John Proctor's most important decision in the play. For Proctor, the soiling of his reputation would amount to an everlasting foul odor, or stench, surrounding his name. This is why he refuses to sign the false confession that Danforth extracts from him. It is another virtue of the film version that this theme comes through loud and clear, thanks to Daniel Day-Lewis's excellent performance.

1. Underline the words that give a clue to the meaning of disputation. Write a sentence of your own using the word disputation.
2. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of retaliation. What is an antonym for retaliation?
3. What are two synonyms for beguile?
4. Underline the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of inaudibly. Use a word meaning the opposite of inaudibly in a sentence of your own.
5. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of the word conciliatory. Use a word meaning the opposite of conciliatory in a sentence of your own.
6. Underline the words in this sentence that offer a clue to the meaning of gaunt. What are two synonyms for gaunt?
7. Circle the word in this sentence that hints at the meaning of penitence. Use the word penitence in an original sentence.
8. Circle the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of the word stench.